

TRUE TEEN STORY: Cross-cultural awareness

# THE NAVAJO

Scope reader  
Victoria Howard  
wears her  
traditional  
patterned shawl  
and turquoise  
jewelry.

In some ways, I'm two people.

I'm Victoria Howard, the senior at Page High School who wants to go to Harvard and study engineering. I'm the kid who likes to hang out with my friends, go to movies, and listen to country music. But I am also a member of the Navajo nation.

We call ourselves *Diné* [dih-NEH]—this means “the People.” I spoke the Navajo language before I spoke English. When I was a baby, my mother sang to me in Navajo. At home, we still speak it. My father never even learned English.

Some people say Navajo is the hardest language to learn—even harder than Chinese. But I consider Navajo, not English, to be my real

#### VOCABULARY PREVIEW:

As you read, look for context clues to learn these words

generator • turquoise • diverse  
• welders • intimidating



# WAY

## Young Native Americans like Victoria Howard, 17, strive to keep their traditions alive

BY VICTORIA HOWARD  
AS TOLD TO JOHN DiCONSIGLIO

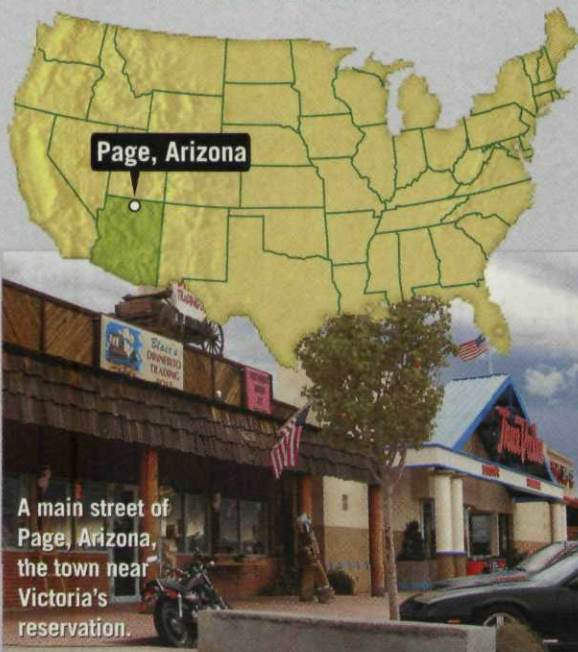
native language. It sounds strange, but sometimes I consider myself more Native American than American.

### A TRADITIONAL LIFE

I have nine brothers and sisters. I'm the youngest. For my whole life, I've lived on the reservation. We have no running water and no electricity. We haul water from a well and use a **generator** or kerosene lamps when we need light.

Now we live in a trailer, but we used to live in our *bogan*. That's a traditional Navajo home made out of mud and straw. It has eight sides, and the door always faces east, to greet the rising sun. Many kids probably wonder how I can live without lights—or a TV. But I love my life on the reservation. It is so peaceful on our land. At night, I can talk to my family. Or I can sit quietly and think.

My parents never went to school. My father raised livestock—sheep, horses, cows. My mother wove beautiful rugs. We've never had



A main street of Page, Arizona, the town near Victoria's reservation.

much money. I remember when I was just starting kindergarten, my parents sold cows and horses at an auction to buy me new clothes.

Ever since I was young, my siblings and I woke up before sunrise to herd sheep. It didn't matter if it was over 100 degrees or below zero. We were taught that good spirits blessed us if we rose early and worked hard. But I still found time to play with my brothers and sisters.

We played house and shopping and school. I didn't realize that, as

we played, my older siblings were teaching me about the world outside the reservation. At night, I helped my mother prepare dinner. I'm not much of a cook. About all I can make is potatoes and spaghetti. But I loved my mom's mutton dumplings. She'd serve them in a hot broth that warmed you on a cold night.

### A DIVERSE EDUCATION

Now I get up every morning at 5 to chase the sheep. The school bus picks me up at 6. It's an hour-and-a-half drive. I usually read or write in my journal. The students at Page High are a mix of reservation kids and "townies"—kids who live in town. Some town kids will tease you if you're too traditional.

Few kids speak Navajo in the halls. Even though three quarters of the students are Navajo, many were never taught their own language. Others are embarrassed by it. They think speaking Navajo will mark them as poor or uneducated. But not me. I love the rising and falling

DAVID DEAL/VICTORIA HOWARD; DWIGHT HAIGH/PAGE, ARIZONA(2)



tones of good Navajo speakers. It's like music.

The Navajo roots are strong in Page—even among kids who pretend that the traditional ways are old-fashioned. Most town kids have a grandparent who still lives on the reservation. And even the boys wear **turquoise** Navajo necklaces.

Our school even helps celebrate the **diverse** aspects of our culture. In the past, Indians weren't allowed to talk about their traditions in school. They had to dress and act like white people. Some students were hit if they spoke Navajo.

But now we have classes in Navajo language and culture. At graduation, many of us wear Navajo clothing. The boys wear headbands, wide colorful belts, and turquoise ornaments. The girls wear skirts and long-sleeve blouses with sash belts, jewelry, and a shawl.

## SURVIVING TRAGEDY

I always wanted my mother to see me graduate. But last year, when I was 16, she died of cancer. It's been hard on my father. Our family is still close, but we've scattered. One of my sisters is studying medicine in the Navy. Three of my brothers are **welders**, like many other Navajo. They are so good that

they travel all over the country, working on some of the biggest buildings in America.

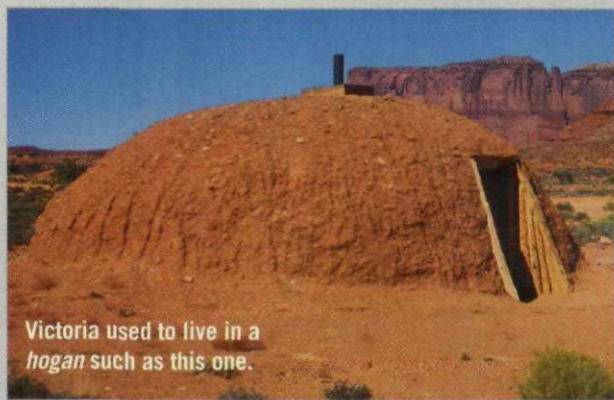
My father misses my mother a lot, but our traditions give him strength. We held funeral ceremonies for my mother in the *hogan*. They made me think of another ceremony called the *kinaalda*. That's a four-day ceremony for Navajo women when they reach puberty.

During my *kinaalda*, I rose at dawn and baked a blue cornmeal cake in the ground. The hard work showed that I could be strong. Then a medicine man chanted songs and prayers to bless me. I was 13, and my mother was so proud.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Soon, I'll leave the reservation too. Next year I'll go to college. It's a little **intimidating**. But I feel my mother watching over me, giving me strength. And I'll be back. I want to be an engineer. I want to come back to the reservation and teach my people how to build better houses.

I know these are tough times for the Navajo. I know a lot of young people have turned their backs on



Victoria used to live in a hogan such as this one.

DWIGHT HATCHER

our culture. But I also know that everything will be OK if we hold on to our traditions, our families. Even when I leave the reservation, I will always remember what my parents taught me: "Be proud of who you are—and where you come from." ■

*Victoria marched with 25,000 others at the opening of a new museum in Washington, D.C., this fall. Read the story at right for more!*

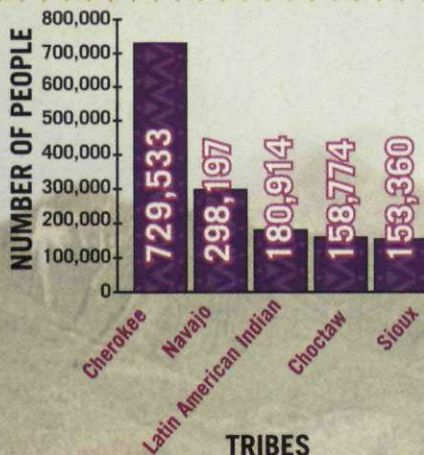
## Writer's Toolbox

Victoria writes about her heritage using **strong, vivid details**. Answer these questions in detail, then use your answers to write a short essay about your heritage.

- What do you know about where your grandparents grew up?
- What cultures are represented in your family?
- Describe a special family ritual.
- What objects do you own that remind you of your roots?

## Native Populations

In 2000, 4.1 million people in the United States identified themselves as American Indian and/or Alaskan Native. That's 1.5 percent of the total U.S. population. This graph shows the Native tribes with the highest populations today.



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1.

## WORD MATCH

Did you learn the words in **red**?

- |                        |                                |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. <b>generator</b>    | a. metalworker                 |
| 2. <b>turquoise</b>    | b. of different kinds          |
| 3. <b>diverse</b>      | c. blue-green stone            |
| 4. <b>welder</b>       | d. unnerving                   |
| 5. <b>intimidating</b> | e. machine for producing power |

Copyright of Scholastic Scope is the property of Scholastic Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.